

Anti-Pakatan dissent spreads online to fight 'hijack' of Bersih
The Malaysian Insider
May 06, 2012
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KUALA LUMPUR, May 6 — An anti-Pakatan Rakyat (PR) movement has surfaced on the Internet and is demanding Bersih co-chairman Datuk Ambiga Sreenevasan stop the polls watchdog from being "hijacked" by the opposition pact.

"Dear Ambiga" (www.dearambiga.com), a website that professes to be pro-Bersih, has accused the federal opposition of hijacking the electoral reform group's cause for their own "political interests and benefit."

The one-page website appeared days after the April 28 rally, which saw tens of thousands of protesters taking to the streets to demand for free and fair elections. The rally ended in clashes between demonstrators and police officers, resulting in scores injured and damage to public property.

The title of the website's solitary page reads "Time to stop Pakatan Rakyat hijacking our movement" and features a picture of Ambiga together with Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim wearing Bersih 3.0 t-shirts.

The website features an automated email function that allows visitors to "email Datuk Ambiga if you want the hijacking to stop."

"Dear Ambiga, I, like you, believe Bersih should be an independent NGO by the people, for the people — of all races, areas, and political views. Our aim is to constantly improve [elections] in this country, not support any particular person or group. But, it's disappointing how we have let politicians hijack our movement for themselves.

"Just look at what happened at Bersih 3.0, when some Pakatan Rakyat bosses took advantage of our noble cause for their own political interests. First, they tried to rally the crowd with partisan speeches and chants like 'tumbang BN', which we had decided not to allow. Then, far more seriously for our reputation, they picked a fight with the police by urging their supporters to force their way into Dataran Merdeka!

"Because of their petty actions, PR has dirtied the name of Bersih and diluted our message. Enough is enough! It's time to claim back our movement from the politicians. Please reassure me and all other Malaysians who support Bersih, that you and the steering committee will do everything possible to make this happen," read the pre-populated email message to the Bersih co-chairman.

The website also features tweets and news articles seemingly critical of PR's involvement in the Bersih rally. It also polls visitors for their views on whether "politicians should be able to influence Bersih?"

Ambiga has repeatedly denied claims that PR was hijacking Bersih to gain political support. She has also been critical of opposition lawmakers over their roles in the Parliamentary

Select Committee (PSC) on electoral reform.

PKR's Anwar and Azmin Ali have been heavily criticised over their alleged roles in last weekend's rally, as well as being accused of instigating the breach of the court-ordered barrier at Dataran Merdeka, after which police began firing tear gas and water cannons at demonstrators.

Foreign media reports of Bersih's rally have painted the Malaysian authorities in a negative light for their purportedly heavy-handed tactics at dispersing protesters.

Bersih 3.0, which had begun peacefully, ended just as Bersih 2.0 did last July 9, with riot police seen chasing citizens down the streets of the capital amid the chaos of tear gas, jets of chemical-laced water and warning bells from police trucks.

The electoral reforms movement remains critical of efforts to improve the voting system by the administration, including the recently-concluded PSC, saying that these were inadequate to guarantee free and fair elections in the country.

It also wants the government to delay the next general election until all of its demanded reforms are implemented.

Bersih's eight demands are a clean electoral roll, reforming postal voting, the use of indelible ink, a minimum campaign period of 21 days, free access to the media, strengthening public institutions, stopping corruption and ending dirty politics.

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